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ABSTRACT

In this experiment, New Mexico State University's College of Continuing Education sponsored a college-discovery program designed to tap a pool of prospective college students hitherto ignored: veterans, housewives, and those others who simply were afraid to try for a college education because of uncertainty concerning their capabilities. Participants, 65 adults who ranged in age from 18 to 56, attended the four-week summer session. Each class session was equally divided between academic instruction (reading, math, and study skills) and career counseling. The stated purpose of the course was to acquaint students with the university, offering them a chance to savor academia and to assess their abilities to compete in the university environment. The bulk of personalized instruction was derived from teacher-made dittos on studying, note taking, skimming and scanning techniques, library skills, and exam preparation. A text was used to promote literal, critical, and affective comprehension of materials. Analysis of results indicated that great strides were evidenced by all those involved--of the original 65 enrollees, 29 applied for the fall semester, and several others expressed their intentions to continue higher education at a later date. (KS)

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DISCOVERY SESSIONS ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Many universities across the country are noticing a decline in enrollment. This has been attributed to the rise in popularity of the community colleges, the ability of non-college graduates to earn substantial salaries in many so-called unskilled professions, the rising costs of tuition, and even the sparsity of college-eligible students. Some see that an available pool of university students lies untapped in the area of those veterans who failed to fully utilize their G.I. benefits, housewives whose grown children no longer tie them down to the home and those who had always thought about getting a college education but were afraid to try because they were uncertain of their own capabilities.



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In a novel experiment, New Mexico State University's College of Continuing Education decided to tap this field and achieved some startling results.

Sixty-five adults, ranging in age from eighteen to fifty-six, participated in a four-week summer "Discovery Session" offered by the College of Continuing Education in cooperation with the Office of Veterans' Affairs. The students were distributed into three classes which met three hours per day on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesday was set aside for conducted tours of the various colleges on the campus. Each class session was equally divided between academic instruction (reading, math and study skills) and career counseling. The stated purpose of this mini-course was to acquaint students with the university, offer them a chance to savor academia and particularly attract those individuals who either wanted to come to school or were interested in discovering if they possessed the necessary attributes to compete in the university environment.

The challenge facing the academic director, at the outset, was in developing an appropriate curriculum for the program. Time constraints such as the twenty-four classroom hours (1½ hours per day, four days per week, for four weeks) necessitated a compact sampling of reading, math and study skills. Writing and rewriting objectives, obtaining the needed materials and equipment for the students to use and the preparation of daily lesson plans were all included in the month-long preparatory stage. It was also necessary to ascertain that the materials would be appropriate for the wide ability and interest ranges expected as well as suitable to be adequately utilized in the alloted time.

After examining reading programs offered in the University's College of Education as well as those in nearby El Paso, Texas' Community College,

a decision was reached to present a multi-variant offering of experiences to the students and allow them to choose those activities which were of interest and personal benefit to them.

As a basic text for the course, W. Royce Adams' Developing Reading Versatility, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Incorporated, 1973, was chosen. This book is organized into three sections, Literal Comprehension, Critical Comprehension and Affective Comprehension. During the first two weeks, it was decided to concentrate on literal skills and then ascend to the more sophisticated levels of reading and comprehension for the final half of the course. Even though the final course outline was not built around the text, the book fit in quite comfortably with the ultimate curriculum guide.

The course provided "personalized instruction" which was more than just individual since the learning experiences were voluntarily undertaken by the students themselves. Three instructors,(one for each of the three daily sessions), adopted, "Do only what you think you need to or are interested in," as the motto for the academic portion. Each lesson plan was centered about a topic for the day. The topic was presented to the entire class, usually accompanied by a teacher-made handout containing practical exercises. After the topic was introduced, which usually absorbed about ten or fifteen minutes of class time, the students were turned loose to work individually in several areas of interest. A few machines, borrowed for the course from the University's reading classes, such as the EDL Controlled Reader (2), Rate Controller (2), SRA'S Reading Rate Accelerator (6) and a self-contained Educulture Incorporated, Mini-Math Program (on taped cassettes with workbooks) were provided for the students as well. The bulk of the personalized instruction was derived from the teacher-made dittoes such as "How to Study", "Notetaking",

"Skimming and Scanning Techniques", "How to use the Library", "How to Prepare for and Take Exams", etc.

Each student was pretested the first week and posttested the final week with the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Forms C and D). Self-scoring answer sheets permitted the students to score their own tests and an item by item analysis of the test's comprehension portion, (Part II), allowed them to pinpoint their own weaknesses.

Frank Christ's Survey of Reading / Study Efficiency (SR/SE) was also administered to each student at the outset of the course. This was also self-scored and analyzed by the students with guidance from the instructor. The Mini-Math Course diagnostic test enabled the student to determine his ability in that area as well. Each student was personally counseled during the first week and individual prescriptions were jointly prepared. The choice of selecting and accomplishing the necessary practice, reading and other exercises was always left up to the student. No minimum requirements were established. In fact, the no-credit and relaxed atmosphere which prevailed throughout the four weeks contributed significantly to the overall success of the program.

In a final report, submitted by the College of Continuing Education, great strides were evidenced by all those involved as the chart below reveals:

SUMMARY OF NELSON-DENNY SCORES

| | |
|---|---|
| LOW GROUP with percentile rankings from 0 to 33 on pretest | TOTAL SCORE MEANS on the Nelson-Denny increased from 17th percentile to 34th percentile (100%). READING RATE MEAN SCORES on the Nelson-Denny increased from 19th percentile to 52nd percentile (173%) |
| MEDIUM GROUP with percentile rankings from 34 to 67 on pretest | TOTAL SCORE MEANS on the Nelson-Denny increased from 52nd percentile to 67th percentile (28%) READING RATE MEAN SCORES on the Nelson-Denny increased from 52nd percentile to 69th percentile (32%) |

Summary of Nelson-Denny Scores continued.

| | |
|---|---|
| HIGH GROUP with percentile rankings from 68 to 99+ on pretest | TOTAL SCORE MEANS on Nelson-Denny increased from 85th percentile to 89th percentile (4%) READING RATE MEAN SCORES on the Nelson-Denny increased from 81st percentile to 89th percentile (9%) |

ALSO: IN THREE WEEKS

| | |
|---|---|
| TOTAL READING SCORE UP ONE FULL YEAR! | Mean grade equivalent for entire class increased from a pretest score of 13.2 to posttest score of 14.2 (TOTAL SCORE) |
| READING RATE UP 2.4 YEARS! | Mean grade equivalent for entire class increased from pretest score of 11.6 to posttest score of 14.0 (READING RATE) |
| VOCABULARY UP OVER 9 MONTHS! | Mean grade equivalent for entire class increased from pretest score of 13.8 to posttest score of 14.7+ (VOCABULARY) |
| COMPREHENSION UP OVER 1.4 YEARS! | Mean grade equivalent for entire class increased from pretest score of 12.6 to posttest score of 14.0+ (COMPREHENSION) |

Of the 65 students enrolled in the Discovery Sessions, all completed the four week course. Twenty-nine enrolled in the Fall Semester. Several others indicated that they intended to go to other schools or enroll at New Mexico State University at a later date. A few invariably discovered that college life was not for them. A detailed listing of the academic curricula used in the "Discovery Sessions" follows at the conclusion of this paper.

The success of this program was manifested in many ways. Student comments were unanimously favorable. Numerous reading, study skills and vocabulary-building courses evolved and have been fully subscribed not only in the College of Continuing Education but in the College of Education as well. Finally, a University Drop-In-Lab has been established which exemplifies the theme of providing reading and study skills assistance according to the needs of all students at New Mexico State University.

It is perhaps a bit premature to fully assess the impact of this endeavor since various outgrowths of "Discovery Sessions" continue to spring up in other areas not only at New Mexico State but throughout the State of New Mexico's university system.

The course overview, as seen in the New Mexico State report, aptly summarized the feeling of all who participated in this experience,

> "In encouraging numbers, the non-traditional student is willing, even eager to become a serious student. Typically, however he hesitates to gamble valuable personal resources in order to return to the campus, primarily because he lacks confidence in his academic and career potentials.
>
> The real purpose of the "Discovery Sessions" is to overcome this barrier and enter New Mexico State confidently.
>
> Adopting the doctrine that competency in academic skills, an awareness of realistic careers, and a supportive campus environment are priority lodestars, we seek to 'accentuate the positve' in students and New Mexico State University, and conversely 'elininate the negative' which often leads to frustration and failure."

ACADEMIC CURRICULA

Week 1

MONDAY JULY 29,

1. Administer Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Form C).
2. Administer SR/SE.

TUESDAY JULY 30

1. Administer Math Diagnostic Test.
2. Prescribe individual remediation based on SR/SE.
3. Familiarize students with the operation and use of the Controlled Readers and Reading Pacers.
4. Introduce Unit on Library ( Pretest and Worksheet)
5. Review and discuss text, particularly the first 10 pages of the text, (Developing Reading Versatility) and let students work through the book at their own pace.
6. Introduce procedure for developing vocabulary using 4x6 cards - 2 words/day.

THURSDAY AUGUST 1

1. Orient students on Math mini-course and how to use it, assign specific areas (individually) to those students based on results of the diagnostic test.
2. Correct Library Worksheets, set up tour of the Library.
   a. Assign (as out of class work) to be turned in on Monday: 5 abstracts (explain fully). Only one need be a complete abstract; the others will only be references.
   b. Show how these cards should look.
3. Students work on Controlled Readers.
4. Students work on Reading Pacers.
5. Students work on Math course.

FRIDAY AUGUST 2

1. Give 5 word test on new vocabulary
2. Guided Tour of Library

Week 2

MONDAY AUGUST 5

1. Unit on Main Idea.
   a. Skimming to identify purpose.
2. Collect abstracts and references.
3. Students work on Controlled Readers.
4. Students work on Reading Pacers.
5. Seudents work on Math course.

TUESDAY AUGUST 6

1. Unit on Dictionary Skills.
   a. Use of pronunciation key.
   b. Using a dictionary.
2. Students work on Controlled Readers.
3. Students work on Reading Pacers.
4. Students work on Math course.

THURSDAY AUGUST 8

1. Unit on How to Study.
   a. Worksheets: Notemaking; Reading a textbook; Poor silent reading habits.
2. Scanning.
3. Students work on Controlled Readers.
4. Students work on Reading Pacers.
5. Students work on Math course.

FRIDAY AUGUST 9

1. Speed Reading Skills.
   a. Worksheet - Developing Speed.
2. Word test on new vocabulary.
3. Worksheets - Pass that Test; How to Take Essay and Objective Exams.
4. Students work on Controlled Readers.
5. Students work on Reading Pacers.
6. Students work on Math Course.

WEEK 3

MONDAY AUGUST 12

1. Unit on Critical Reading.
   b. Worksheet - Facts about Propaganda.
2. Students work on Controlled Readers.
3. Students work on Reading Pacers.
4. Students work on Math course.

TUESDAY AUGUST 13

1. Unit on Writing Skills.
   a. Paragraph and Theme Writing.
   b. Patterning for Paragraph Organization.
2. Students work on Controlled Readers.
3. Students work on Math Course.

THURSDAY AUGUST 15

1. Speed Reading.
2. Exercise on Comprehension and Flexibility.
3. Administer Reading Flexibility Test - SRA.

FRIDAY AUGUST 16

1. Word test on new vocabulary.
2. Individualized reading instruction.

WEEK 4

MONDAY AUGUST 19

1. Critical Reading from text - p. 195.
2. Individualized Reading Instruction.

TUESDAY AUGUST 20

1. Work from text - p. 313.
2. Individualized reading instruction.

THURSDAY AUGUST 22

1. Administer retest of Nelson-Denny (Form D)

FRIDAY AUGUST 23

1. Review results of Nelson-Denny Reading Test.
2. Word test on new vocabulary.
3. Student feedback.